

Assembly Joint Resolution

No. 34

**Introduced by Assembly Members Achadjian, Charles Calderon,
Gatto, and Portantino
(Coauthors: Assembly Members Fuentes, Olsen, and Williams)
(Coauthors: Senators Dutton and Liu)**

March 26, 2012

Assembly Joint Resolution No. 34—Relative to human rights.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL’S DIGEST

AJR 34, as introduced, Achadjian. Human rights.

This measure calls on the United States President and Congress to urge the government of the Republic of Turkey to honor its obligations under international treaties and human rights law.

Fiscal committee: no.

1 WHEREAS, California is a leader in advancing human rights
2 and has regularly commemorated over the past few decades the
3 Armenian Genocide; and
4 WHEREAS, California is home to over one million descendants
5 of the victims of this genocide including Armenians, Greeks,
6 Assyrians, Pontians, and Syriacs in the Ottoman Empire in the
7 years of 1915 to 1923, inclusive and
8 WHEREAS, These descendants are congregants of churches
9 with parishes in California, but whose roots are based in
10 communities now left bare by that genocide, and the access and
11 ownership of their Christian cultural heritage remaining in the
12 Republic of Turkey today is prevented; and

1 WHEREAS, There is continued concern about the welfare of
2 Christians in the Republic of Turkey, their right to worship and
3 practice their faith freely, and the legal status and condition of
4 churches and other places of worship, monasteries, schools,
5 hospitals, monuments, relics, holy sites, and other religious
6 properties in the Republic of Turkey; and

7 WHEREAS, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
8 (UDHR) affirms that “(e)veryone has the right to freedom of
9 thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to
10 change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in
11 community with others and in public or private, to manifest his
12 religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”;
13 and

14 WHEREAS, The Republic of Turkey is a signatory to the
15 UDHR, and therefore is obligated to accord to all its citizens,
16 including religious minorities, “freedom of thought, conscience
17 and religion,” as defined by the UDHR; and

18 WHEREAS, The Ottoman Empire’s oppression and intentional
19 destruction of much of its ancient Christian populations, including
20 over 2,000,000 Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Pontians, and
21 Syrians, has left only a small fraction of these populations to care
22 for their vast religious heritage within the present borders of
23 modern Turkey; and

24 WHEREAS, The non-Muslim population in the contemporary
25 Republic of Turkey is less than 1 percent of the total population,
26 rendering these religious communities especially vulnerable; and

27 WHEREAS, The Republic of Turkey has been responsible for
28 the destruction and theft of much of the Christian heritage within
29 its present borders; and

30 WHEREAS, The Republic of Turkey, through official and
31 unofficial acts of discrimination, intolerance, and intimidation, has
32 hindered the remaining Christians on its territory from freely
33 practicing their ancient faith; and

34 WHEREAS, In its 2011 Annual Report, the United States
35 Commission on International Religious Freedom placed the
36 Republic of Turkey on its “Watch List” for the third straight year,
37 and concluded that “[t]he Turkish government continues to impose
38 serious limitations on freedom of religion or belief, thereby
39 threatening the continued vitality and survival of minority religious
40 communities in Turkey”; and

WHEREAS, The Republic of Turkey's reforms carried out over the past decade to ameliorate the situation of religious minorities have been sorely inadequate; and

WHEREAS, The United States House of Representatives expressed similar concern regarding the Republic of Turkey's treatment of its Christian communities in passing H.Res. No. 306 on December 13, 2011, led by California Congressmen Ed Royce and Howard Berman; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly and the Senate of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature calls on the United States President and Congress to urge the government of the Republic of Turkey to honor its obligations under international treaties and human rights law to do all of the following:

(a) End all forms of religious discrimination; and

(b) Allow the rightful church and lay owners of Christian church properties, without hindrance or restriction, to organize and administer prayer services, religious education, clerical training, appointments, and succession, religious community gatherings, social services, including ministry to the needs of the poor and infirm, and other religious activities; and

(c) Return to their rightful owners all Christian churches and other places of worship, monasteries, schools, hospitals, monuments, relics, holy sites, and other religious properties, including movable properties, such as artwork, manuscripts, vestments, vessels, and other artifacts; and

(d) Allow the rightful Christian church and lay owners of Christian church properties, without hindrance or restriction, to preserve, reconstruct, or repair, as they see fit, all Christian churches and other places of worship, monasteries, schools, hospitals, monuments, relics, holy sites, and other religious properties within Turkey; and be it further

Resolved, That Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, Members of the United States Congress, the Governor, the Turkish Ambassador to the United States, and the Armenian National Committee of America-Western Region.